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U.S. said to be sending \$500 million in covert aid to four insurgencies

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WASHINGTON — A year after adopting a policy of backing anti-communist insurgencies worldwide, the Reagan administration is spending more than \$500 million in covert aid to rebels in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Nicaragua, administration sources have said.

The 210,000 guerrillas receiving assistance is the largest number in U.S. history. They are the first such groups being aided by the United States since the CIA trained 30,000 Laotian Hmong and 50,000 Vietnamese Montagnard rebels during the Vietnam War.

Administration officials who have been briefed on the programs said last week that the intent of the CIA-administered aid program is to erode Soviet influence in the Third World and ultimately deal Moscow a strategic blow without the use of nuclear weapons.

The strategy, recommended by CIA Director William J. Casey and approved by Reagan in January 1985, rests on the premise that the two superpowers are already engaged in a war of sorts using proxy armies, the officials said, with the United States trying to roll back Moscow's gains by aiding pro-Western rebels.

"The way to hurt Moscow is through the colonies, not in a frontal war which could end the world," said one official, quoting from routine briefings at which Casey's views have been outlined.

He said Casey believes U.S. aid to foreign rebels is justified by the decision in the 1960s by then-Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev to aid Third World "wars of national liberation."

Asked for comment, the CIA declined and instead released a copy of a little-publicized May 1, 1985, speech by Casey in which he addressed what he termed "the subversive war which the Soviet Union and its partners have been waging against the United States and its interests around the world for a quarter of a century or more."

"This campaign of aggressive subversion has nibbled away at friendly governments and our vital interests until today our national security is impaired in our immediate neigh-

borhood as well as in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America," Casey said in the speech.

Casey continued that Moscow's backing of leftist rebels stemmed from its long-term strategic intention to take over three primary targets vital to U.S. national security: Middle East oil fields, the Panama Canal and Mexico.

The genesis of the new guerrilla-aid policy was Reagan's decision six weeks after taking office in 1981 to authorize the CIA to spend \$19.5 million to help organize the first contingent of Nicaraguan rebels, or contras.

Reagan also increased from \$100 million to \$250 million CIA funding for mujaheddin rebels in Afghanistan, a program President Carter began in 1979 after the Soviet invasion of that country.

But the two programs were uncoordinated.

The idea of a comprehensive policy of aiding rebels can be traced to anti-communist adventurer Jack Wheeler, who last year helped the pro-Reagan Citizens for America organize a "summit" of anti-Soviet insurgents in rebel-held Angolan territory.

Wheeler says he got the idea during a 1983 tour of battlefields in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Nicaragua. He later briefed Casey, Shultz, then-U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick and Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North of the National Security Council, who today serves as the chief White House contact with the contras.

According to officials, the secret Restricted Inter-Agency Policy Group — made up of representatives from the security council, CIA, Pentagon and State Department, and known as the 208 Committee — recommended a coordinated policy of supplying lethal and "humanitarian" aid to the insurgent groups in the four countries. Reagan endorsed the recommendation in early 1985.

Shortly afterward, Congress lifted its 1975 ban on aid to the Angolan rebels and approved assistance to the Cambodians. But Congress refused to renew military aid to the contras, approving instead \$30.1 million in nonlethal assistance, communications gear and CIA aid.

This year, the 208 Committee recommended an escalation of CIA operations in all four countries. According to congressional sources with access to classified data, Reagan early this year secretly authorized the CIA and other agencies to administer \$523 million in new assistance to the four insurgent groups.

The aid includes \$400 million in military and humanitarian aid — and 150 Stinger shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles — to the Afghan mujaheddin; \$100 million in military and logistical assistance to the contras, including 50 Stingers; \$15 million to the rebels in Angola, along with 50 Stingers; and \$8 million in nonlethal aid to the Cambodians, including uniforms, communications equipment and intelligence data.